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TAGS: PGOV PREL TR CY

SUBJECT: (C) CYPRUS: SEPTEMBER 3 LEADERS' MEETING POSTPONED AS CONFIDENCE-BUILDING EXERCISE BECOMES CONFIDENCE-BUSTER

Classified By: DCM Jonathan R. Cohen for Reasons 1.4(b) and 1.4 (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: According to Greek Cypriot (G/C) media reports, approximately 650 Greek Cypriots set to attend a September 2 morning mass in Turkish Cypriot (T/C)-administered territory were unable to pass a T/C crossing point due to G/C snafus with passengers lists and a lack of T/C good will. The mass took place and was well attended by G/Cs who crossed at other checkpoints (and by the Ambassador). Access for the Greek Cypriots through Limnitis was seen by most of the G/C community as linked to the August 8 successful transit of Turkish Cypriots through the same check point to attend a commemoration in a T/C enclave. The inability of the G/Cs to pass will weigh heavily on the second round of UN-brokered peace talks. Finger-pointing is in full swing, and details of what actually happened remain murky. In the wake of the crossing debacle, lead G/C negotiator George Iacovou announced publicly the decision to postpone the September 3 opening of the second round of Cyprus negotiations in order to avoid a "shadow" on the talks; T/C "Presidential Spokesman" told the T/C press it was disappointing that the G/C side will not be coming to the September 3 meeting for "unimportant" reasons. UNSYG SA Downer, who called the Ambassador late afternoon September 2, has asked us to weigh in with the G/Cs to attend the next scheduled meeting on September 10. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Downer told Ambassador September 2 that according to UN Police on site, this had all the hallmarks of a "stunt" by the local G/Cs. Turkish FM Davutoglu, visiting the north yesterday, told Downer by phone September 1 that everything was set for the crossing. The G/Cs, he claimed, were informed they'd have to show IDs, have their names on a master list, and they'd be waved through. Six hundred people were expected at the checkpoint at 0600, but by 0730, according to Downer's UN sources, only 80 were there. When the mukhtar (local leader) of Kato Pyrgos showed after 730 with an additional 520 persons, the group reportedly refused to show ID. When they gave their names, instead, to check against the list, some were told their names were not included in the lists. At this point the G/Cs left the checkpoint en masse in a huff. Downer told the Ambassador that the T/Cs sensed this was coming, adding that he thought that things may have been mucked up the mukhtar.

¶3. (C) A Greek Cypriot local official at the scene offered a different version to G/C media. He said G/C lead negotiator George Iacovou submitted a participant list via the UN to Turkish Cypriot authorities that differed from the list submitted by local G/C authorities. Consequently, T/C police took almost two hours to check the first two buses (out of twenty-seven) and refused passage to thirteen on board. The first two buses reportedly turned around. (Note: Some reports suggest that these two buses were from Paphos and were never intended to pass through the Limnitis crossing, but through a different crossing at Astromeritis. In this case it would be true that the T/C police may have had no

previous notice of their names and perhaps thought extra buses were being slipped in with those they'd been informed of. End note.) A local Greek Cypriot official told Turkish Cypriot police that the main group, outside of the initial two buses, still wanted to enter; he was told that they would also face an identity check and decided to turn the entire group around. Press reports indicate that nine passengers at the Astromeritis/Bostanci crossing point were refused entry without being given a reason when they attempted to travel to Morphu for vespers the night of September 1.

¶14. (C) A number of Greek Cypriots (some 500, according to press reports) had crossed from other check points the evening of September 1, however, and reached the Saint Mamas Cathedral in Morphou, a formerly majority G/C town now inhabited by Turkish Cypriots under T/C administration. They conducted September 1 evening vespers, and a September 2 morning mass with the Ambassador in attendance. Saint Mamas church was repaired with USAID funds and is the "home" church of the pro-solution Bishop of Morphou.

¶15. (C) With President Christofias on an official visit to France, Iacovou announced publicly the decision to postpone the September 3 opening of the second round in order to avoid a "shadow" on the talks; T/C "Presidential Spokesman" told the T/C press it was disappointing that the G/C side will not be coming to the September 3 meeting for "unimportant" reasons. UNSYG SA Downer has asked us to weigh in with the G/Cs to attend the next scheduled meeting on September 10.

¶16. (C) Comment: The inability of the G/C worshipers to pass through the checkpoint for the mass will, no doubt, rile RoC President Christofias, especially given G/C flexibility in

making sure the August 8 T/C crossing went off without a hitch. Iacovou is still smarting from a T/C refusal to allow passage for the St. Mamas mass in September 2008, which he perceived as a betrayal of an earlier promise. If the deal struck by Iacovou and Nami was, as Downer was told by Davutoglu, that G/Cs were to show ID at the crossing, Iacovou may be in for heat from G/C hardliners. If this was the deal, it is unclear why the mukhtar behaved as he did. On the other side of the table, Talat and Nami are likely to cry foul, having agreed to a process the local G/C muhtar reportedly decided to disregard. End comment.

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